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Cooperation between the United Nations and the Inter-Parliamentary Union

Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 51/7 of 25 October 1996, entitled "Cooperation between the United Nations and the Inter-Parliamentary Union". In that resolution, the Assembly welcomed the conclusion on 24 July 1996 of the cooperation agreement between the United Nations and the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) (A/51/402, annex) and considered that the signature of the agreement constituted an important step for increased and strengthened cooperation between the two organizations.

2. In the same resolution, the General Assembly decided to include in the provisional agenda of its fifty-second session the item entitled "Cooperation between the United Nations and the Inter-Parliamentary Union" and requested the Secretary-General to submit a report to the Assembly at that session on various aspects of cooperation that had taken place between the two organizations in implementation of the cooperation agreement.

II. Cooperation between the United Nations and the Inter-Parliamentary Union

3. Cooperation between the United Nations and IPU has been strengthened since the conclusion of the cooperation agreement and the ensuing period has seen several examples where the two organizations now undertake joint and mutually reinforcing action.

A. Promotion of peace and security

4. At the IPU Conference held at Seoul in April 1997, the United Nations was given support during the debate and in a resolution on security issues, in which the Conference called for the United Nations to be provided with the requisite financial, human and technical resources. At the same Conference, IPU discussed and adopted a resolution on the emergency situation which prevailed at the time in both Albania and the then Zaire. On Zaire, the Conference called upon the parties to the conflict to adhere to and implement the United Nations five-point peace plan and called for support for the joint United Nations/Organization of African Unity Special Representative for the Great Lakes Region.

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5. Continued parliamentary support was given to the Secretary-General of the United Nations for his mission of good offices to secure a settlement of the Cyprus problem. The IPU Council has repeatedly urged all mediators in the Cyprus issue to harmonize their efforts with those of the Secretary-General. Recently, it again called upon all interested parties to abide by United Nations resolutions and repeated that the only framework for the settlement of the Cyprus issue was the one defined by the United Nations.

6. The United Nations efforts to secure a worldwide ban on anti-personnel mines were given support by IPU. Throughout 1996 and 1997, it carried out an extensive parliamentary survey to determine what action had been or was being taken with a view to a ban and the conclusion of a treaty on the subject, to be followed by rapid national ratification and the adoption of the corresponding legislation and regulations. IPU also gave its support to the call for funding the Voluntary Trust Fund for Assistance in Mine Clearance set up by the United Nations in 1995.

B. Promotion of representative democracy

7. Representative democracy is a field in which the United Nations works closely with IPU. This includes action in favour of the participation of women in political life, which is at the core of IPU work to promote representative democracy.

8. The United Nations has been receiving increasing support from IPU in the provision of technical assistance and advisory services to parliaments. Sometimes, this activity is carried out in the context of a peacekeeping operation (e.g., in Haiti, where IPU is currently implementing a comprehensive million-dollar programme to assist the parliament). In other instances, it is the Resident Representative of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) who directly requests IPU assistance. IPU is currently implementing projects or otherwise extending support to national parliaments in response to such requests in Cape Verde, Gambia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Rwanda, South Africa, Viet Nam and Yemen.

9. UNDP works closely with IPU and often provides funding and support to IPU projects to assist parliaments as part of its promotion of good governance. In that context, the two organizations are examining means to expand further their collaboration in project execution. UNDP received substantive support from IPU for the International Conference on Governance for Sustainable Growth and Equity, which was organized by UNDP in New York in July 1997. In particular, IPU co-sponsored with UNDP the Parliamentarians' Forum, which brought together members of parliaments from some 75 countries.

10. The ongoing preparations by the United Nations for the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights received backing from IPU at its meeting at Cairo in September 1997 through the adoption, by its Council, of a resolution recommending parliamentary action to mark the anniversary and calling upon parliaments to provide support to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. In the resolution the Council also called upon all Parliaments and their members to ensure prompt ratification of the international and regional human rights treaties, as well as harmonization of the national legislation with the norms and standards contained in those instruments with a view to their full implementation. The Cairo meeting also assisted United Nations system-wide efforts on behalf of children by adopting recommendations for parliamentary action with regard to child labour, commercial and other forms of sexual exploitation of children, and the protection of children in armed conflict. Different United Nations mechanisms for human rights (Commission for Human Rights, human rights treaty bodies, special rapporteurs and working groups) collaborate with the IPU Committee for the Human Rights of Parliamentarians through regular exchanges of information.

11. Following its consideration of a study on democracy, conducted by IPU together with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and a panel of international experts, IPU adopted a Universal Declaration on Democracy at its meeting in Cairo. The Declaration sets out the basic principles of democracy and the elements and standards for the exercise of democratic government, and addresses the international dimension of democracy.

C. Follow-up to major United Nations conferences

12. National parliaments have an important role to play in implementing the outcome of major United Nations conferences. This was recognized by the General Assembly at its nineteenth special session when it stated, with reference to the 1992 Conference on Environment and Development, that transparent and participatory processes should be promoted when integrating economic, social and environmental objectives and that "this will require the involvement of national legislative assemblies" (resolution S-19/2, annex, para. 24 (b)).

13. IPU participated actively in the preparation, holding and implementation of the results of the 1992 Conference on Environment and Development. IPU also participated in the 1997 session of the Commission on Sustainable Development and the nineteenth special session of the General Assembly. At its special session, the Assembly received an overall evaluation of parliamentary action to implement Agenda 21 based on a worldwide survey of parliaments which IPU carried out in 1996. The report stressed the lack of financing and the slow transfer of technology impeded implementation of Agenda 21 and called upon Governments to respect the commitments they had already made on behalf of Member States at Rio de Janeiro. The Assembly also received the result of a debate on measures required to change consumption and production patterns so as to achieve sustainable development which IPU had held at Seoul in April 1997, and to which the United Nations had contributed an information paper. The Declaration that emerged from IPU debate urged that Governments and parliaments adopt and implement national and international policies that were really conducive to harmonizing lifestyles with the fundamental principles of sustainable development. The President of the IPU Council called for the required political will and commitment to launch anew the "spirit of Rio". He also reiterated the commitment by parliaments to intensify their work in the field of sustainable development.

14. On the occasion of the World Food Summit in 1997, IPU organized a "Parliamentarians' Day", in which 190 members of parliament from over 70 countries participated. The meeting, which was jointly organized with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), focused on food insecurity and its root causes and on effective follow-up of the results of the Summit. It adopted a Declaration in support of the Summit. At the Summit IPU announced its intention to set up a mechanism to monitor implementation at the parliamentary level of the commitments made in Rome. The IPU Council endorsed the Declaration adopted by the Summit and initiated a process whereby parliaments are encouraged to take action to implement the commitments taken in Rome.

15. At its one hundred sixtieth and one hundred sixty-first sessions, held in April and September 1997 in Seoul and Cairo, respectively, the IPU Conference adopted two resolutions in which it invited all IPU member parliaments to promote the implementation of the Rome Declaration on World Food Security and the Plan of Action adopted by the World Food Summit;[1] expressed support for the FAO special programme for low-income food-deficit countries, the "Food for All" campaign and "TeleFood 1997", a global telecast which, together with a worldwide "Appeal Against World Hunger", is designed to encourage solidarity in the fight against hunger; and welcome the joint FAO-IPU Inter-parliamentary Conference on agricultural production for attaining the objectives of the World Food Summit while respecting the environment, to be held in Rome in November 1998 at the invitation of the Italian parliament.

16. Joint action by the United Nations and IPU was also undertaken in the follow-up to and implementation of the results of the World Summit for Social Development. In September 1996, the United Nations, UNDP and IPU organized a tripartite meeting at United Nations Headquarters involving representatives of Member States, members of parliament and representatives of United Nations agencies and departments concerned with the follow-up to the Summit. The meeting drew up an initial catalogue of priority measures for action by parliaments to address critical issues relating to poverty eradication, the attainment of the goal of full employment and the realization of social integration. This was subsequently finalized and adopted by the IPU governing bodies and sent to all world parliaments for follow-up and implementation. IPU, at its meeting at Cairo, adopted a resolution on employment in a globalizing world after a debate to which the United Nations contributed an information paper and keynote speaker.

17. IPU has done much to promote the status of women and especially their participation in political life. IPU played an important role in mobilizing parliamentarians in the preparatory process to the Fourth World Conference on Women at Beijing and during the Conference itself. For example, IPU presented a plan of action to correct present imbalances in the participation of men and women in political life and held a "Parliamentarians' Day" at which a parliamentary declaration was adopted committing parliaments to follow up on the outcome of the Conference. The United Nations, and in particular the Division for the Advancement of Women, cooperated closely with IPU, throughout the preparatory process of Beijing. Furthermore, the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Gender Issues and the Advancement of Women has participated in the specialized conference of IPU at New Delhi in February 1997 on the theme of towards partnership between men and women in politics. This was an important meeting devoted to follow-up of the Fourth World Conference on Women and was an unprecedented event at the international level since it brought together an equal number of men and women members of parliament from some 80 countries and provided the occasion for innovative debates on ways of ensuring the joint exercise of political responsibilities.

18. As part of the follow-up to the World Conference, the Commission on the Status of Women invited the President of the IPU Coordinating Committee of Women Parliamentarians to its 1997 session to form part of a panel on women in decision-making and to present the work of IPU on the question. Various substantive proposals that had emerged from the IPU debates and studies in recent years were taken up by the Commission. The United Nations has also made good use of the study which the IPU prepared for the New Delhi conference on men and women in politics: democracy still in the making. It was published together with a new colour-coded poster showing on the world map the status of women's participation in parliaments as at 1 January 1997 and since 1945. The study looks at three key areas: women's participation in political parties, in the electoral process, and the space and role they occupy in national parliaments. The United Nations Statistical Division now uses the complete statistical data that IPU has developed on the history and evolution of women's participation in parliament.

III. Concluding remarks

19. The past year has seen a significant strengthening of cooperation between the United Nations system and IPU. Agreements of cooperation have recently been concluded between IPU and UNESCO as well as with FAO. Both of these build upon the example set by the agreement between the United Nations and IPU and advance further the concept of cooperation between parliaments and Governments at the international level.

20. As the Secretary-General mentioned in his programme for reform, parliamentarians are a key group within the constituencies that are acquiring growing importance to the United Nations and which warrant special consideration. National Parliaments, which work together at the world level through IPU, have a major role to play in the pursuit of the goals of the United Nations.

Notes

[1] Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, *Report of the World Food Summit, Rome, 13-17 November 1996, Part One* (WFS 96/REP) (Rome, 1997, appendix).